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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT : Session with Secretary Laird on 12 April 1971

PERSONS PRESENT: Secretary Laird, General Pursley, Mr. Carver

1. The session opened with a discussion of the Secretary's request, relayed via Mr. Thomas Constant of ISA on 9 April, for a CIA review of data relating to the enemy's manpower position and combat force strengths. I explained that the points raised were ones in which there had been considerable published comment in recent weeks and that we would have the requested paper by Wednesday, 14 April, but had not been able to have it ready by Monday, 12 April. I also said we were planning to do a unilateral Agency memorandum which we would show to DIA and ISA but which would not be a coordinated paper. Secretary Laird said that this was exactly what he wanted and the Wednesday date would be fine. He explained that he was very troubled by the various casualty and manpower figures now in ~~circulation~~ circulation, since collectively, it did not add up in any consistent fashion. Reported casualty kept climbing, infiltration and recruitment were allegedly down, and nonetheless overall enemy force strengths appeared to stay level or, if anything, to increase. There had been much talk about the closing of the "Vinh window" with -- as Laird described it -- the chiefs arguing that because of the closing of the Vinh window, the enemy was massing

some great threat which would suddenly be sprung after further increment of U.S. troop withdrawals.

2. I told Mr. Laird that his remarks seemed to me to involve several separate considerations, some of which appeared to have become strangled together.

a. He was correct about the existent anomalies between casualty figures (up) and strength figures (superficially level or also up). There were several analytical problems here involved including that of periodic adjustments of enemy combat strength base lines. We would review the bidding on this problem once again and inform the Secretary of our findings.

b. On the threat question, the Agency had certainly not argued that any massive enemy threat was developing. Our position on logistics and manpower, in essence, was that Hanoi would probably be able to pump enough supplies and replacement through the Laos trail network this year to enable Communist forces in Cambodia and lower South Vietnam to sustain approximately 1970 levels of enemy-initiated military activity, i. e., harassment punctuated by occasional flurries or "high points." We did not believe Hanoi was going to be able to develop the manpower supply pool sufficient to support a sustained series of major

military offensive operations within this calendar year. The foregoing conclusion, however, was based on the assumption that Hanoi would continue to operate with the prudence that is marked its military behavior over the past decade, i. e., consisting on the prepositioning of a "logistic nose" before undertaking major offensive activity. With manpower and materiel resources already available in Cambodia and lower South Vietnam, Hanoi would always have the availability to mount a sharp offensive flurry if it was willing to use up all current resources without having replacements stockpiled.

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information, however, indicates that about 5,000 infiltrators had gone through the entire system undetected. Hence for the time being, infiltration data was clearly not going to be as hard, timely or reliable as it had been in the past.

3. From the above conversation, Secretary Laird launched into a fairly long disquisition on Vietnam policy. He indicated that he felt that some of the "threat arguments" advanced by the JCS were intended to slow down the process of U.S. disengagement. With considerable heat he noted that much of U.S. military establishment refused to acknowledge the fact that the U.S. government was committed to near-total withdrawal from China. People kept assuming that there would be some sort of residual force or at least a continuing level of air support capability; but this was simply not going to be the case. The President had made up his mind, and therefore, clearly indicated in private sessions with key Republican senators and congressmen that the U.S. was in fact committed to a policy of withdrawal, even though not for public announcement, the President could not yet afford to be bluntly candid about this policy.

4. We went back and forth, and around, on the above theme for about a half hour. Laird clearly considered that the policy he was enunciating has obvious ramifications regarding Vietnam, but about U.S. ability to support a continued struggle in Laos -- the latter being the subject of current discussion between CIA, DOD and

the Department of State. Laird explicitly stated, several times, that this was President Nixon's policy. It is clearly Secretary Laird's policy whether or not it is Henry Kissinger's or the President to the extent that Laird says it is on matters I am not presently in a position to judge with definitive accuracy.

5. In discussing the above matters, I made the point that the South Vietnamese, particularly senior military echelons with JGS Chief

Vien the most notable example, were very prone to want the U.S. to do their hard work with air and fire power. It seemed to me that we needed to encourage the Vietnamese